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Review for IFJP

Gender, Violence and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives

Edited by Aili Mari Tripp, Myra Marx Ferree, and Christina Ewig

In this welcome addition to Feminist Security Studies literature, Tripp, Ferree and Ewig aim to identify not only how feminist perspectives might enrich the concept of Human Security, but also, and more ambitiously, how the concept of Human Security might add to feminist analyses of and responses to gendered violence.

In an clear and engaging introduction, Tripp outlines the reasons why feminists might be – and have been – sceptical about engaging with the Human Security framework, such as its poor track record of including sexual violence, and the risks of securitizing that which is best addressed by other conceptual frames, but argues, convincingly to my mind, that the opportunities outweigh the risks. As she points out, no one framework can be perfect for addressing injustices and insecurities, and, most of the criticisms address ill-considered applications of the framework, not the concept of Human Security itself. In Tripp's suggested feminist reformulation of Human Security, the global and long term structural causes of insecurities, gendered power dynamics, and a more complex notion of 'people-centeredness' would all be central.

The book contains a further ten chapters which not only provide further support for this feminist reformulation of Human Security, but also begin to address the book's second aim – identifying ways in which a Human Security approach may strengthen feminist understandings of insecurity. The cases covered are wide-ranging, but the book never feels disjointed or disparate, as some edited collections can. Although some chapters are far less explicit about addressing the central theme of the book than others, they are clearly part of the same endeavour. Peterson and Ni Aoilain, for example, barely mention Human Security as a term, but it hardly matters because they demonstrate so lucidly and convincingly how we need a feminist approach to fully understand the gendered insecurities caused by war (in Peterson's case) and the importance of including gender-based violence in post-conflict priorities (in Ni Aoilain's).

A key strength of the book is the way in which insecurities faced by different groups in the global north and south are analysed side-by-side. It's to the editors' credit that it never feels tokenistic or odd to be reading about welfare-recipients in inner-city USA in the midst of chapters about more traditionally 'security' topics such as inter-communal violence in Africa (Stites), trafficking of women in Asia (Kinney), or post-conflict reconstruction in the Balkans (Heideman). Because all the contributions share certain thematic concerns, such as the importance of an intersectional analysis and neoliberalism as a causal factor in gendered insecurities, the chapters form a coherent collection and the unusual juxtapositions serve to illuminate the main aim of demonstrating the need to gender human security. The understanding of gender as intersectional is a point emphasised and elaborated upon usefully in the conclusion where Ferree uses the concept to draw the insights of the chapters together, making the claim that if Human Security is framed in binary rather than intersectional terms, it can do more harm than good.

The subdivision of the book into parts focused on 'retheorising Human Security,' 'case studies of gendered violence' and 'policy considerations' is a little misleading and unnecessary as all of the chapters address all three tasks. They all introduce empirical cases which are informative, analytically rigorous and thought-provoking; they all discuss current policies aimed at tackling insecurities; and they thus all could be said to be involved in the task of retheorising Human Security

through a gender lens. This achievement could be highlighted, rather than disguised by the categorisation into parts.

My only other slight reservation about the book was with the chapters which focused on critiquing the policies aimed at tackling violence (e.g. Ewing on the German media's response to Honour Killings; Kinney on Thailand's response to trafficking, Bumiller on the US response to sexual violence). Whilst they present insightful analyses of the harmful effects of NGO and media representations of gendered violence, and the risks of engaging with the neoliberal state in order to tackle it, they contain a tendency to equate the harm done by the policies with the harm done by the initial violence, which seems to be overstating the case and leading to a dead-end politics of despair. This could have made for a depressing read, but Ferree's decision to conclude with pragmatic suggestions for using a feminist Human Security perspective (and other chapters such as Henriquez and Ewig's on Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and Rubio-Marin and Estrada-Tanck's on the synergies between Human Rights and Human Security, which are more positive about attempts to address gendered violence) ensure that the book strikes an effective balance, outlining the policy challenges, but not shutting down optimism about the potential for a more secure world.

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